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ABSTRACT

Recent research has produced ambiguous results as to whether traditional training in multicultural development, awareness, knowledge, and skills is necessary to produce counseling competence. To explore this question, a study of multicultural counseling competence prior to multicultural counseling training is reported here. For the study, a content analysis of the counseling transcripts of 25 White, masters level counselor trainees who counseled an African American male client was performed. The results indicate that when effective use of all other microcounseling skills was controlled for, trainees that more effectively used directives and/or reframe statements were perceived to be the most competent by the client, significantly predicting his perceptions of counseling effectiveness and his willingness to return to counseling. In each of the cases of counselors' use of directives and reframing statements, the issue of race was initiated by the counselor as a possible explanation for the client's experience. Results of focus group discussions, in which counselor trainees that generated reasons for White counselors' willingness to consider race as a possible explanation when some did not, are presented. (MKA)

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White Counselor Trainees:

Is there Multicultural Counseling Competence without Formal Training?

Abstract

In order to examine multicultural counseling competency prior to multicultural counseling training, a content analysis was performed of counseling transcripts of twenty-five, White masters' level counselor trainees with an African American male client. Results indicated that effective use of the microcounseling skills, directives and reframing, significantly predicted an African American male client's perceptions of counseling effectiveness and the client's willingness to return to counseling. In each of the cases of counselors' use of directives and reframing statements, the issue of race was initiated by the counselor as a possible explanation for the client's experience. Results of focus group discussions with counselor trainees that generated reasons for White counselors' willingness to consider race as a possible explanation when some did not are presented.

White Counselor Trainees:
Is there Multicultural Counseling Competence without Formal Training?

Introduction

Michael D'Andrea (1991) identified a relationship between the student's multicultural development, awareness, knowledge, and skill, and formal instructional strategies. In a somewhat different approach, with different outcomes, Sharon Robinson (1988) proposed that traditional training was not necessarily the only effective method whereby students learn counseling competence. Instead, she found that students using a self-instructional style were as effective in learning basic counseling skills as students taught using traditional methods. Comparison of the previous findings suggests that traditional training methods are not the only source of counseling skill acquisition and that some students may begin training programs already having acquired fundamental skills that predispose them to effective multicultural counseling relationships before training. Future examination of this possibility is warranted.

In an article addressing the issue of counselor self-awareness, Richardson and Molinaro (1996) discuss critical factors concerning counselor competence. They suggest that self-awareness is based on three components: knowledge about the unique nature of cultural groups, including and understanding of the sociopolitical experiences of those groups; skill acquisition focused on the quality and appropriateness of interactions between counselor and clients of other groups; and self-awareness of the role of culture in one's own experiences. They conclude by suggesting that counselors focus on the influences of worldview (Sue, 1981), cultural values (Katz, 1985), and racial identity (Helms, 1995) as they relate to the counselor's ability to integrate

personal-cultural concept with the skills necessary to perform counseling tasks in a competent manner.

In addition, Ponterotto (1998), commented on a new wave of qualitative research dealing with characteristics of competent counselor trainees in training programs. The profile consists of the following characteristics: 1) the ability to exercise openness and curiosity with relation to training activities; 2) the ability to demonstrate willingness to examine their own socialization history– family and community environment, schooling, church, friendships, etc; 3) the ability to exhibit courage to self-disclose their own views, opinions, feelings, and questions during group discussions; 4) the ability to be nondefensive in their interpersonal interactions and can absorb and consider feedback regarding their own sexist, racist, and homophobic attitudes and expectations; 5) characterized by high levels of resiliency, psychological hardiness, and cognitive complexity; 6) involvement in formal multicultural training; 7) the ability to effectively process strong affective states and to consider alternate philosophies of life in an open-minded fashion; 8) a commitment to social justice and developing multicultural competence in spite of the many challenges that are involved in the process; and 9) active engagement in efforts to learn more about multicultural issues through additional course work, conferences and workshops, and independent reading and research. These students, in general, are committed to increasing their personal contact with others across many cultures.

More recently, researchers have attempted to describe the characteristics of ideal White student trainees. To this point, critical questions about what causes some trainees to demonstrate skills that are perceived to be more effective before multicultural counseling training, when other trainees do not, still remain unanswered. Identifying some widely accepted assumptions

surrounding the training of majority group counselors will provide a point to begin this investigation.

The first assumption proposes that all White students are multiculturally incompetent, before training, and that some form of remediation is necessary before they will be perceived as effective in cross-cultural counseling relationships. History indicates that Whites in general, because of the sociopolitical implications of majority group membership, experience high levels of cultural encapsulation (Pedersen, 1995). Not only do White counselor trainees experience higher levels of cultural encapsulation, but they are unaware of the impact of their racial identity on clients of other cultures that they work with. The collective group of White counselor trainees, in this sense, are ineffective cross-cultural counselors before training intervention. However, as in many cases, research has not addressed the characteristics of White counselor trainees that are perceived as effective by a client from a different culture before receiving formal multicultural training.

The notion that all White trainees are encapsulated, to the extent that they are ineffective, overlooks the possibility that each student possesses a unique configuration of cultural experiences, socio-political beliefs, and moral guidelines from which to draw on when fostering empathic relationships. Our potential, as a profession, for better understanding the dynamics of diverse counseling relationships may rest with identifying unique characteristics of White counselors that enter training programs and are not culturally encapsulated. Better understanding their life experiences and attitudes may help in the pursuit of more effective multicultural training models.

The second assumption proposes that racial identity status and sensitivity will increase with training in multicultural awareness, culture specific knowledge, and related counseling skills. The belief being that teaching students about other cultures and exposing them to experiences with diverse populations 'should' improve their ability to be empathic or effective in a multicultural counseling relationships with minority clientele. There seem to be missing factors in this competency equation. Effective counseling relationships involve more than knowledge about the cultural background of the client, they involve understanding the interactive effects of two people from different life experiences, and they involve issues of counselor openness and willingness to address issues of diversity in counseling sessions. Steward, Morales, Bartell, Miller, and Weeks (1998) conducted a study in which they reported that completion of or participation in multicultural counseling course work does not necessarily indicate an acceptance of or valuing of multicultural counseling literature or issues addressed therein. It is fairly evident from continued research on effective training programs, that the profession is searching for additional factors that explain why some trainees demonstrate more competence than others and why some trainees respond more positively to training than others.

The purpose of this study was twofold. The intent of Part I was to examine the variance in multicultural counseling competence with a minority client among White trainees who have not received multicultural counseling training. It is believed that some students enter training programs with value systems and interpersonal styles and experiences that indicate a readiness for additional or higher level multicultural counseling training and that some do not. Some students without multicultural counseling training enter with higher levels of multicultural counseling competence than others. The objective of Part I is to test this assumption and to identify exactly

what White trainees, who are perceived as more competent by the client, actually do differently within the counseling session.

Part II of this study is to generate a number of explanations for this phenomenon of minority client perceived multicultural counseling competence without multicultural counseling training among White counselor trainees.

Methods

Counseling Transcripts

Twenty-five transcripts of 20-25 minute counseling sessions with a role-playing African American male client whose presented problem was an `unexplainable` sense of isolation and feeling of alienation as a doctoral student within a predominantly white program. White masters level counselor trainees, who had no multicultural counseling courseware, participated in these sessions immediately after completion of course requirements for enrollment in counseling practicum and participated to receive feedback on basic counseling strategies and techniques prior to practicum.

Measure

One dependent variable was the Relationship Inventory (University of Minnesota) that was adapted from the Relationship Inventory-Form OFM-64 by G.T. Barrett-Lennard. The 36-item, 7-point Likert scale measure was developed to assess the counselor effectiveness as perceived by the client. Higher scores indicate the higher levels of perceived counselor effectiveness.

The second dependent variable was the client`s response indicating the degree, on a 7-point scale, to which they would be willing to return after this first contact with the counselor-trainee. A higher score indicated a greater willingness to return.

Procedure

Participants were encouraged to relax and to use skills acquired through counselor training course work and previous experiences to develop rapport and some understanding of the client's presenting concern within the twenty to twenty-five minute time constraint. The trainees were told that they did not have to solve the client's problem by the end of the session.

The 'client' was a stranger to the counselor trainees, was a doctoral student in a mental health related field, and had received training in multicultural counseling. The client presented the same presenting concern with each trainee. This concern was related to vague feelings of alienation and isolation as a doctoral student in a program on campus. The client had been prompted not to mention the possibility as race as a contributor to his experience.

All sessions were videotaped and were scheduled over a period of two days. Sessions were scheduled in a manner to avoid client fatigue. Counselor trainees were asked not to discuss the content of sessions with peers until after the final session.

After each session, the 'client' completed a Relationship Inventory (University of Minnesota) that was adapted from the Relationship Inventory-Form OFM-64 by G.T. Barrett-Lennard. Each measure completed by the 'client' was assigned a number that indicated the session order. The scores on this measure were one of the dependent variables in this study; the other was the willingness to return to counseling. After all sessions had been completed, participants received the client's and faculty rater's evaluations. Copies of these evaluations with no other identifying information, except the session order, were maintained for the purpose of data analysis.

Typewritten transcripts of each session were developed by the faculty member, and primary researcher, that were numbered in the order of time and date of session. No other identifying information was maintained. Videotaped sessions were erased. Transcripts were more closely analyzed in terms of the degree of use of microcounseling skills and the effective use of such skills. The results of this analysis identifying the effective use of the microcounseling skills served as the independent variables in this study.

Results

Each microcounseling skill was assigned a number of 0 to 4. If the counselor did not use this skill, a rating of 0 was assigned; a rating of 4 indicated the most effective use of that particular microcounseling skill. Factor analyses of the microcounseling skills indicated four factors. (Factor 1, closed and open ended questions; Factor 2, paraphrasing and the identification of assumptions; Factor 3, attention to affect, reflection of content, use of self; and Factor 4, directive and reframing).

Table 1 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis with counselor effectiveness as the dependent variables and each of the factors indicated above as the independent variables. Though the entire model was not found to be effective, Factor 4 microcounseling skills (Directives and Reframing) were found to be the only significant predictor of client-perceived counselor effectiveness ($p = .04$).

Table 2 presents data indicating that Factor 4 microcounseling skills were also found to be the only significant predictor for the dependent variable, the willingness to return for future counseling ($p = .007$). Findings suggest that when the effective use of all other microcounseling skills are controlled for, it is the use of directives and reframing statements that predict client

perceived counseling effectiveness and willingness to return for counseling in the future. In reviewing those counseling transcripts of those receiving higher client ratings, it was observed that counselor trainees in those sessions tended also to initiate the discussion of race or minority status as one of a number of possible explanations for the 'client's' experience. Race nor minority status were not mentioned by counselor trainees in sessions with lower ratings.

Qualitative Results from Focus Group Discussions

Several questions for future research resulted from the empirical Part I of this study: First, given that we know that some trainees are perceived as effective counselors in cross-cultural counseling relationships before receiving multicultural training, what characteristics set them apart from peers who are not perceived as effective? At the conclusion of the data analysis phase of Part I, a group of first and second year masters students, in a counselor training program, were interviewed concerning their perceptions of factors that might influence the development of untrained, yet multiculturally counseling competent, trainees. Responses varied and included the following: a) interaction with diverse groups of people–exposure to different cultures, b) open mindedness; self-awareness; morality or a clear sense of right and wrong in how to treat others; c) a commitment to religious or spiritual values and related activity; d) ability to challenge generalizations and assumptions; e) interpersonal and close relationships with racial/ethnic minorities and members of other special populations before or during training versus traditional book learning; f) origins in families that were open minded, void of racist values; g) personality characteristics of integrity and trustworthiness; inquisitive nature; h) personal experience with persecution based on within majority group ethnicity or religious differences; and, i) feelings of anger related to pervasive racist ignorance.

The findings of this interview parallel those of this study as well as those presented by Ponterotto (1998), in that students expect personal differences in trainees that are perceived as competent, as well as provide a valuable beginning for the broad definition of candidates that may best be served by training programs that emphasize the importance of diversity, awareness, and receptive attitudes concerning multicultural training. Students who have not had these experiences or qualities may not have the necessary readiness for multicultural training nor be able to cope effectively in training programs committed to the inclusion of and valuing diversity.

Discussion

Developing training programs that provide optimum multicultural training opportunities for counselor trainees and selecting trainees that will benefit most from interacting with effective multicultural training programs are primary goals of counselor training faculty and the counseling profession. Therefore, understanding the qualities of both effective counselor trainees and effective counselor training programs is paramount to the future of counselor multicultural development (Ponterotto, 1998). In the absence of research addressing multicultural counseling competence of White trainees before training, counselor educators may overlook the basic competency of trainees who have life experiences and 'ways of being' that allow optimal use of some of the microcounsleing skills that would be most positively received by minority clientele. Findings from this study indicate when the effective use of all other microcounseling skills was controlled for, trainees that more effectively used directives and/or reframe statements perceived to be the most competent by this minority client. Although other interpretations are possible and welcomed, this data suggests that some counselor trainees bring with them qualities and experiences that result in more positive perceptions from a minority client than others. This is

particularly of interest given that the 'client' in this case was a doctoral student who had received multicultural counseling training and who was in a mental health profession.

Findings also highlight one quality of trainees that might be associated with perceptions of counseling competence by a minority client, but was empirically unexamined in this study. Trainees' comfort with and willingness to initiate conversation about race with a racial/ethnic minority individual also may have contributed to positive evaluations of sessions by a 'client' who had received multicultural counseling training. Though there is some earlier research that support this outcome, future research in this area is certainly warranted.

Though it might have been assumed that those who were perceived as more competent might have responded differently than those who were not, it is not quite clear why the use of these particular microcounseling skills, directives and reframing, appeared as the distinguishing variables. One possible explanation is that the use of directives may be indicative of a sense of personal confidence and trust in self that would allow the trainee to more comfortably request information from the client on certain topics. In addition, reframing may, in fact, may be indicative of higher levels of cognitive complexity than the more reflective skills. Trainees' use of reframing requires generating another perspective that is more empowering and that the client had not considered. To engage in such higher order thinking, this may require not only a sense of comfort with the setting, but with the client, and with self in the role of counselor. Anxiety related to either of these sources might diminish the capacity to make reframe statements.

Readers must note that a significant amount of the variance in client's perceptions of counseling competence was not explained by this study. These findings preclude any notion that multicultural training is not necessary for all White counselor trainees, especially when

considering that all of the trainees had exposure to instruction on effective use of the same microcounseling skills. Aside from the unknown relationship of microcounseling factors one, two, and three on multicultural counseling effectiveness, some trainees simply did not use the skills of Directives and Repatterning to develop an effective cross-cultural counseling relationship when some of their peers did. The reasons for this finding are not explained. Possible explanations include: anxiety related to a new cross-cultural experience or facing the potential for the discussion of racism in the context of counseling; inability to recognize and explore differences between the client's and counselor's world views; and fear related to addressing issues of race in a racist society. This outcome might have also been due to counselors' non-verbals that were considered more attractive by this client and consequently resulted in more positive evaluations. Though all trainees had experienced the same training up until this point in their graduate education, differences in counseling experience and therefore differences in social comfort with a stranger in developing rapport in a counseling or helping relationship might have also influenced the results. Future research addressing the counseling competence of White trainees would assist in the increasing our understanding of the life experiences that might influence counseling competence with minority clientele. In addition, we might have a more effective use of required curriculum that acknowledges varying levels of multicultural counseling competence among trainees upon admissions.

There are other interesting research questions that might be addressed in future studies: Does multicultural counseling training result in an additive effect of White trainees' counseling competence who exhibited competence prior to training? What is the influence of multicultural counseling training on racial/ethnic minority or special population counselor

trainees? Is multicultural counseling competency with clients indicative of multicultural sensitivity and cross-cultural interpersonal competence with peers? with those is varying levels of power status. Too often, multicultural counseling competency may be erroneously interchanged or assumed to be the same as multicultural sensitivity and respect in day to day relationships. To ignore the importance of developing and maintaining culturally sensitive and respectful working environments with colleagues, with supervisees, and with supervisors would be a major oversight in identifying goals for the counseling profession. These are just a few of the critical issues that we must examine as we move from a professional state wherein some of us are competent and some of us are not, toward a profession wherein cultural interpersonal sensitivity and multicultural counseling competence are the norm.

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Table 1.

Results of multiple regression analysis with counselor effectiveness as the dependent variable and Factor 1, 2, 3, and 4 as the independent variables.

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
Factor 1	-.69	.72	-.27	-.95	.35
Factor 2	.11	.34	.07	.33	.74
Factor 3	-.38	.28	-.34	-1.35	.19
Factor 4	.56	.25	.53	2.18	.04
(Constant)	6.15	1.31		4.67	.0001

Table 2.

Results of multiple regression analysis with willingness to return for counseling as the dependent variable and Factor 1, 2, 3, and 4 as the independent variables.

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
Factor 1	-.97	1.11	-.23	-.88	.38
Factor 2	.22	.52	.09	.42	.67
Factor 3	-.59	.43	-.32	-1.38	.18
Factor 4	1.18	.39	.68	2.99	.007
(Constant)	5.32	2.00		2.65	.01